

Attn: Jared Hart

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Subject: Public Comment  
on CVSP DEIR

RECEIVED

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CITY OF SAN JOSE  
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Attention: Jared Hart, CVTF Members and City Council  
Subject: Comments on the Draft CVSP EIR  
From: Mark Anthony Siskaros  
460 South Hill Street  
San Jose, CA 95112

Mr. Hart, members of the Coyote Valley Task Force and City Council Members,

I was born and raised in a rural part of San Martin, just south of Morgan Hill. Through my short life I've watched as acre after acre of farmland has been converted to housing. I am only 22, and what's happening now in the South Bay is what those older than me witnessed in San Jose, Cupertino, Santa Clara, East Side and South San Jose: the wholesale destruction of what used to be called the "Valley of Heart's Delight" by poor planning.

I commend the city for making an attempt at meeting this area's housing and job needs by planning something other than just tract homes and strip malls. However, the Coyote Valley Specific Plan came a little too late. It is nearsighted and will mean the loss of the last undeveloped stretch of the Santa Clara Valley floor. In the preceding decades we have paved the Valley floor to wall with low density housing. The farming and wildlife that defined the South Bay in its early days have disappeared from most places. But in Coyote Valley, you can still see row crops butting up against the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. You can still see a deer crossing a country road, and buy cherries from a road-side fruit stand. For like some of us have, you can see Tule Elk grazing on the in the Diablo Range, looking out over a valley that was once their home.

Here's some information that I hope you folks will consider before bulldozing the place.

#### **The Need to Preserve Farmland**

Farmland near metropolitan areas is often the most productive (Daniels 1997), mostly because America's major cities were founded near productive agricultural centers. The American Farmland Trust had some interesting statistics to share regarding this issue. Roughly one third of the nation's prime farmland exists within metropolitan counties or in adjacent counties that are also threatened by urbanization. Each decade, we lose more prime land at a faster rate than the previous decade, "We lost farm and ranch land 51 percent faster in the 1990s than in the 1980s" (AFT 2007). Prime Farmland is converted at a faster rate (30 percent) than other agricultural land that has a greater number of limiting factors, such as low water resources, low-quality chemical composition, or undesirable topography.

An analysis of AFT data found that while only 10% of metropolitan counties were at serious risk of losing farmland to urbanization, "these counties accounted for almost a quarter of total U.S. Agricultural Sales." (Green and Harlin 1995)

So what we have in a situation the most logical land to grow food on is converted at the highest rate, and agriculture is pushed onto marginal land in the Arid West (Green, Harlin). At the same time, cultivation is intensified on the prime farmland that remains to obtain greater and greater yields (Imhoff et al 1997). The general public is aware of the

impending water and oil shortages that we face as a nation, but not many realize how these shortages will affect our national food supply. When we can no longer pipe water from the Colorado River into the desert, when we no longer have the oil supply to transport food long distances to population centers, that is when these structural problems of our food system will become apparent.

We cannot rely on the importation of food from international sources. The loss of prime farmland is a global trend, and accelerating at an alarming pace as developing countries urbanize. Asian countries like China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea are no longer exporting their surplus food products, they are some of the fastest growing food importers (del Mar, 2001). India is not far behind - with a projected demand for food grains of 350 million tons by 2015, the country would have to increase production at 5% a year, with a scanty 1.6% barely possible during the last 5 years (Fazal 2001). Global demand for food is expected to double by 2030 (del mar 2001) if we Americans expect our children to eat, we need to act now to preserve our farmlands.

There is a social as well as economic element to this debate. Keeping agriculture local is a way of ensuring that communities stay connected to their food source. Participating in a local food system reminds us of our connection to nature. Farmer's Markets are great forums for community building and in Santa Clara County, they continue to increase in popularity. But as we shift to a global food economy, the farmers who work prime farmlands such as those in Coyote Valley do not feel it is possible to continue farming profitably. It is much simpler to sell their land at inflated prices and leave food production to the developing world or the Central Valley. As a city, we need to put a premium on protecting this farmland that is useful to all of us, and finding ways to make farming in Coyote Valley profitable.

### **Common Goals - Preserving Farmland and Conserving the Natural Environment**

A shift to high value, organic farming operations would go hand in hand with preserving the environment in Coyote Valley. As you probably know, the survival of the Bay Checkerspot Butterfly on Coyote Ridge is dependent on managing the landscape with cattle. The cows remove excess vegetation that would otherwise choke out butterfly host species. Contrary to popular belief, intelligent farm and ranch practices can fit in very nicely with natural conservation programs.

When considering a highly urbanized metropolitan landscape such as ours, agricultural areas are often some of the only habitat available to wildlife. One subject that is being strongly debated in relation to Coyote Valley is the need for a wildlife corridor between the Diablo Range and Santa Cruz Mountains. The concept of matrix habitat explains that because of human use, natural wildlife habitats have been highly fragmented, and remaining habitats are isolated from each other to varying degrees (Jules and Priya 2003). This is related to the type of land use, and the intensity of that use. The concept of matrix habitat is important in understanding animal population migrations. Sharing similarities to metapopulation theory and island biogeography, the concept of matrix habitat treats isolated remnants of natural habitat as "islands." The difference is that instead of an ocean that blocks almost all plant and animal migration, matrix habitats provide a range of permeability for animal migration. In the context of Coyote Valley, we have the vast Diablo Range to the East, a riparian corridor along Coyote Creek, orchards and row crops that lead to the Santa Cruz Mountains on the west side. Biologists have

seen native Tule Elk crossing the 101 freeway in Coyote Valley (USFW Service, 2007), researchers and students from De Anza college have gathered data that proves Coyote Valley is being used as a corridor, despite the barriers that wildlife face. There is even anecdotal evidence obtained from local farmers that the cropland in Coyote Valley has been used by elk on the Western side of Coyote Valley. The area is mostly dark and silent at night, where a large portion of animal migration might occur. By replacing the benign, perhaps even beneficial farmland habitat in Coyote Valley with the high density 70,000 person development proposed by the Coyote Valley Specific Plan, we will be adding more light, more car traffic, more physical obstacles in the forms of buildings and roads, and more noise to what is even now a viable wildlife corridor between two important habitats.

A Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Communities Conservation Plan for the Coyote Valley area is currently under preparation. The plan will contain valuable information that should show what any possible development in Coyote Valley will look like. The plan will almost certainly be in effect long before construction begins, yet San Jose currently plans to exempt Coyote Valley and hold it to a lower environmental standard than what the State requires of the rest of the County. San Jose City Council and Planning Commission should use the HCP/NCCP as a precursor to any development plans for Coyote Valley and the development of the Coyote Valley Specific Plan should stop until the HCP/NCCP reports are released.

### **Preserving Local Agricultural and the Natural Environment is Popular**

The economic, social and ecological implications of losing farmland near metropolitan centers are extensive and can be expanded on to a much larger degree than has been done here. Can human and natural communities exist in a landscape that is dominated by pavement? The average person does not think so, as demonstrated in the landmark paper, *Public Attitudes Toward Local Farmland Protection Programs*, by Owen J Furseth. A researcher based out of the University of California in San Diego, Furseth has long studied urbanization pressures on farmland in San Diego County. This particular study was conducted in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, which is a county that has similar demographics and development trends to those of Santa Clara and San Diego Counties. These include high median income, high farmland conversion rates (32,873 acres converted in a two decade period) and a local agricultural economy that is steadily increasing in value through intensification of land use practices. Of 850 adults interviewed, 70.9% responded that it was important to preserve the existing farmland in Mecklenburg County. Furthermore, 42.4 percent of respondents were willing to pay higher taxes to do so (Furseth 2001). So politically, protecting Coyote Valley is prudent.

### **What Coyote Valley Means to projects in the rest of the City**

There are areas of downtown San Jose that are dying, and the city owes East Side San Jose tens of acres of parks and open space. The new San Jose City Hall was built with over \$100 million of taxpayers money while community centers and hospitals have closed. We need a better water treatment plant, more public transportation, and a variety of other services. I seriously doubt that the Dahlin Group and other developers will foot

the entire bill for Coyote Valley, as has been stated before. Developing this area prior to redeveloping within San Jose's urban limits is shortchanging those who already live here.

Many times, City Council members and others have stated that redeveloping North 1st Street, downtown and other areas will not be enough to meet our housing goals. That is no excuse to proceed with developing Coyote Valley before redeveloping these areas. Until San Jose is a world-class city with high density, walkable neighborhoods, a good public transportation system, and adequate parks in every part of the existing city, any further buildout is unwarranted.

### Conclusion

CVSP must include an extensive wildlife corridor system that will allow for movement of everything from red-legged frogs to Tule Elk from one side of the valley to another.

CVSP must include a riparian buffer that extends 500 feet from Coyote and Fisher Creeks. CVSP must preserve the Laguna Seca Wetlands.

CVSP must be predicated by the jobs to housing triggers that were discussed at the June 26, 2007 City Council meeting. Funding must be in place for Caltrans, Lightrail and bus extensions into the area before building begins.

CVSP must include a 1:1 mitigation ratio for preserving farmland. And no, that doesn't mean that you can save those greenhouses in the "Greenbelt" area south Coyote Valley as sufficient mitigation. For every acre of prime farmland destroyed, we need to put one acre of prime farmland in Santa Clara County back into production. If this is too costly, the Coyote Valley Specific Plan is too costly.

CVSP must include more than 400 acres for serpentine habitat mitigation. Over 100,000 more car trips a day will increase the nitrogen load in these areas to dangerous levels.

I'm sure you folks are busy, so I'll leave it at this: Coyote Valley holds all the vestiges of Santa Clara County's past. Destroying it to satisfy a momentary need for more housing is not only stupid, it borders on criminal. It is the responsibility of our city government to meet our future housing needs through infill development within the boundaries of what's already developed. That is your responsibility to all citizens of San Jose, to my future children, and to generations who will live here after we are all dust.